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ABSTRACT

The practical concerns of an individual interested in learning about prayer in an academic context are interconnected with the practical concerns about teaching an academic course on prayer. A pilot study proposed to investigate and evaluate the context and content of academic courses on personal prayer from the perspective of teaching prayer, asking what proportion of institutions of higher education offer courses on prayer, in which department, and on what level. The search was limited to the Christian faith, and in particular to private colleges and universities of the Catholic denomination. An online Internet search yielded a sample of 126 Catholic colleges/universities. A comprehensive search of the 126 Web sites that comprised the sampling frame resulted in finding 12 colleges that offered specific courses on personal prayer. Almost all the colleges had a course on "liturgical prayer" dealing with worship, sacramental rites, and corporate prayers, but not on personal prayer. Of the 12 Web sites with a primary emphasis on personal prayer, only five were able and willing to send syllabi. Findings show that only 10% of Catholic institutions of higher education offer courses on personal prayer, perhaps because of the focus on liturgical prayer. An Internet survey for other Christian colleges yielded 221 institutions of higher education that might offer courses on personal prayer. Future research could examine other avenues in which an individual could learn/teach prayer. (Contains a table of data and information on courses offered.) (NKA)

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Teaching Prayer:
Pilot Survey of Academic Courses on Personal Prayer

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The dawning of the new millennium has sparked a renewed interest in spirituality as evidenced by a cursory glance at newspaper headlines, best seller lists, and titles of recent movies.[1] Accompanying the resurgence of interest in spirituality, is a parallel but less pervasive interest in prayer as a method of communicating, connecting with, and experiencing God. For example, many of the articles, books, and movies in footnote one are related to prayer. Some individuals experiencing a renewed spiritual awareness have a relentless hunger for private personal prayer and would like to know how they can deepen their pray life while others are just beginning to experience the unsettling pangs of hunger for private prayer time and are asking, how can I learn to pray?

There are a number of possible answers to such questions about learning how to pray or how to deepen one's prayer life. For instance, one may submit to the discipleship of a prominent guru while living in an Indian ashram for a summer. Or, one may attend a week's retreat at a Benedictine monastery to learn the fundamentals of lectio divina and perhaps even the beginnings of contemplation. Given a limited travel budget, other options for learning about prayer include: (1) reading a book on prayer, (2) attending a prayer workshop/seminar sponsored by a local church, synagogue, mosque, or temple, and the traditional "Sunday School" or "Catechism" class. There is also the option of enrolling in an academic course on personal prayer. However, before enrolling in an academic prayer course, one might like to read a course description, preview the text(s), and examine the instructor's credentials.

The practical concerns of an individual interested in learning about prayer in an academic context are interconnected with the practical concerns about teaching an academic course on prayer. Specifically, this study proposes to investigate and evaluate the context and content of academic courses on personal prayer from the perspective of teaching prayer. By examining the teaching of prayer, I hope to eventually address a fundamental spiritual hunger that the new millennium has reawakened in the hearts of many: how can one begin and/or grow in their efforts to communicate, connect with, and experience God in prayer. There are three specific research questions that guided this investigation of prayer:

R1: What proportion of institutions of higher education offer courses that deal primarily with the topic of personal prayer?

R2: Of the institutions of higher education that offer courses on personal prayer, to what degree is there a consensus among the various courses on: (1) department that the course is offered in, (2) level that the course is offered (undergraduate versus graduate), (3) educational credentials of the instructor, and (4) course title, description, readings, assignments, outline of topics, and grading system?

R3: In order to integrate the various courses on personal prayer, and to provide a starting point for those interested in the academic teaching of prayer, what would an "ideal" syllabus for a course on personal prayer look like?

Method

Sample

There are a number academic institutions in the continental United States that might offer courses on prayer from a variety of faith traditions. I limited my search to the Christian faith, and in particular private colleges and universities of the Catholic denomination. The Catholic Church, having the longest historical tradition among the Christian denominations, should logically have one of the most well developed Christian prayer traditions, and this tradition of prayer should be reflected in the content of courses offered at institutions of Catholic higher education. I am not suggesting that other private or public institutions of higher learning of other denominations or faith traditions do not offer courses on prayer. This pilot study on teaching prayer necessarily has a limited scope; eventually, I hope to expand the scope of the study to include other Christian denominations and other faith traditions.

An on-line internet search using the Yahoo search engine and the key words "Catholic education" yielded a sample of 126 Catholic colleges and universities. There are probably additional Catholic institutions of higher education that are not represented as a "web presence" on the internet and should be included in the present sample, but due to the cost factor of mailings and long distance calls for information, I decided to exclude an unknown number of these institutions from the sampling frame and accept this a limitation of the pilot study. A comprehensive search of the 126 web sites that comprised the sampling frame resulted in finding 12 colleges that offered specific courses on personal prayer. Almost all of the colleges had one or more courses on "Christian Spirituality" which typically included some aspect of prayer; however, since prayer was not the primary emphasis in the course description, these were excluded from the sampling frame. Moreover, almost all of the 126 colleges had a course on "Liturgical prayer" dealing with worship, sacramental rites, and corporate prayers. While this qualifies as a type of prayer, it does not fit well with the present study's emphasis on the context of personal prayer; thus, these were excluded from the sample. Of the 12 web sites that did have a primary emphasis on personal prayer, only five individuals were able and willing to send course syllabi. My recruiting efforts included three e-mail requests for syllabi over a period of 6 months and three follow-up phone calls during a three week period.

Results

Research Question 1

Research question 1 queried the percentage of colleges that offered academic courses on personal prayer. Examination of prayer course titles and descriptions in the sampling frame of 126 Catholic institutions of higher education indicated that 12 institutions (10 %) offered one or more courses on personal prayer.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was designed to explore the context and content of prayer courses associated with the 12 institutions found in answer to research question 1. Note that the following results were based on the five institutions that sent the author copies of course syllabi, or 42 % of the 12 institutions that offered courses on personal prayer.

Contextual Characteristics of the Prayer Courses. In terms of general contextual characteristics that described the five prayer courses, four of the five were housed in a department of religious studies and/or theology, and were offered at the undergraduate level. The geographical local for the institutions spanned the continental U.S. (one east coast, one west coast, one south, and two mid-west). All of the instructors were women with a Ph.D. or the equivalent (e.g., Th.D.). Finally, all of the courses had the term "prayer" or a derivative thereof in the course title. In sum, a generic profile of the prayer courses from the pilot sample might read: Ph.D. credentialed women offer undergraduate religious studies courses on personal prayer in every geographical location in the continental U.S.

Course Descriptions. Course descriptions included terms that emphasized a particular aspect of prayer and were grouped into three categories: the "what" of prayer (e.g., forms of prayer, nature of prayer, stages of prayer), the "why" of prayer (e.g., meaning of prayer, purpose of prayer), and the "how" of prayer (e.g., methods of prayer, practice of prayer). Two related themes emerged in comparing multiple course descriptions: an expertise theme, and an experiential theme. The expertise theme dealt with classic and contemporary Christian and non-Christian writers on the topic of prayer. The experiential theme described in and/or out of class times to experience, reflect on, and discuss students' unique style/pathway of prayer. Finally, several dialectical tensions (contrasting terms which can be treated as polar opposites or creatively synthesized) were evident in examining the course descriptions: world religions as eastern and western, public and private prayer, images of God as male and female, introspection and transcendence, integration and discovery, faith and knowledge, listening and writing, and joy and sorrow.

Content Domains of the Prayer Courses. Content domains were identified as the main topic areas covered in the prayer courses based on the outline of topics in the course syllabi. The main content domain covered in all of the courses was types of prayer. The frequency that different types of prayer were covered across the five courses was as follows: all courses included scriptural prayer, three mystical prayer, two contemplative prayer, and two healing prayer. Other specific prayer types which occurred in only one of the courses were clustered into the subdomains of active and receptive types of prayer (Baesler, 1999). Active types of prayer emphasized the activity of the person praying and included: charismatic, intercession, lectio divina, mantra, praise, psalms, ritual, and Taize types of prayer. Receptive types of prayer emphasized God's activity during prayer and included: centering, listening, monastic, presence, and Zen mediation types of prayer. A second major content domain evident in all of the courses was "spirituality and prayer." Spirituality topics were described by terms such as human development, relationship with God, stages of prayer (purgative, illuminative, and unitive), and prayer as a journey.

Content domains were qualified by particular verbs and suggested a progression in the development of theoretical and experiential knowledge in four of the five prayer courses. All of the courses included terms such as "identification, exploration, and description" of concepts related to prayer. These concepts were intellectually processed/synthesized, resulting in various levels of theoretical understanding. The theory was then "reflected, analyzed, connected" via practice in praying (instructors used phrases like: how prayer fits one's personality, developing one's own method of prayer, practicing meditation, and developing a prayer life). Finally, praxis and theory were usually expressed by students via written prose and oral presentations except for one instructor that also encouraged the expression of prayer via: music, art, poetry, and movement.

Course Activities. Reading, lecture, discussion, and papers were the primary activities in all five of the prayer courses. Providing a context for students to experience prayer in the classroom was also important for four of the five courses. Homework assignments that encouraged students to pray outside the classroom, and the keeping of a prayer journal, were activities listed in the outlines for three of the five courses. Of lesser import, represented by activities in two of the five courses, were exams and answering assigned questions related to course readings.

Three qualifications of these general findings related to course activities are in order. First, the term discussion included various types of presentations. For example, leading an in-class prayer experience, group sharing, oral presentation of a paper, and book reports all constituted "discussion." Second, the papers assigned by instructors were quite diverse, for example: an 8-10 page research oriented paper, four "reflection papers," a "spiritual autobiography," and the creation of "five original

prayers." Thirdly, the description of the phrase "in-class prayer" was nearly identical for two of the courses and different for the remaining ones. The two courses that operationalized "in-class prayer" in a similar fashion was likely due to their use of same text by De Mello (1978). This text systematically assists the reader in developing a prayer life via prayer experiences such as body sense awareness, thought control, breathing, and the use of the imagination. The remaining courses described in-class prayer time with terms like "guided meditation" and "fantasy."

Prayer Resources. The greatest diversity among the prayer courses was in the type and content of the prayer resources used including books, journals, internet sites, and video. Three of the five courses recommended 3-7 texts, two courses made use of web sites, two also made use of video, and one course used journal articles as prayer resources for the class. The most frequently used reading resource was the Bible (three out of the five courses), the next most frequent reading resources were two books Sadhana (De Mello, 1978), and Awakening to prayer (Okumura, 1994). Both texts were required in two of the five courses. The remainder of readings, videos, and web sites covered a plethora of topics on prayer and spirituality with no specific content themes across the five courses.

Assessment/Grading System for Courses. The most common method of assessing student learning in four of the prayer courses (only 4 of the 5 syllabi in the sample included a percentage breakdown for student grades) was a journal/portfolio of materials related to prayer. See Table 1 for comparative percentage breakdowns of the relative weight for each component of the student's grade. Seventy-five per cent of the courses required one or more papers, and an evaluation of student discussion/participation. Half of the courses required individual presentations and examinations.

Research Question 3

Having identified the contextual and content themes of the courses on personal prayer for research question 2, we turn to research question 3 which asked: what would an "ideal" syllabus for an academic course on prayer look like? I have attempted to synthesize the findings from the previous content analysis, and where appropriate, added additional information based on other prayer research (Baesler, 1997 & 1999).

Instructor: Ph.D. in a field related to prayer (such as Theology, Religious Studies, Pastoral Studies, Communication, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology).

Department: Any department of Religious Studies/Theology

Level of Study: Undergraduate

Title of Course: Prayer

Course Description: The course will explore the history, import, and purposes of personal prayer primarily within the Christian tradition. Definitions, types/forms, methods, and theories of personal prayer will be covered with an emphasis on the student's experience of prayer in and outside of class.

Course Outline Of Topics (assuming a 16 week semester course):

Introduction to the course

Wk 1: Discuss syllabus, journal, papers, presentations, exams, and prayer activities.

Import/Significance of Prayer

Wk 2: Call to prayer
Dubay (1989); Video: Menninger (1994)

Wk 2: Finding one's vocation/mission via prayer
Video: Lifeworks

Wk 3: Prayer and spiritual direction
Dubay (1993); Douglas (1998)

Wk 3: Prayer in everyday life
Groeschel (1984); Video: Groeschel (1991)

Theory and Method of Prayer

Wk 4: 50 definitions of Christian Prayer (Baesler, 1997)
Types of Prayer: ACTS (Kreeft, 1991)

Wk 5: Two Ways of Prayer: Apophatic and Catophatic
Menninger (1994); Video: Menninger (1994)

Wk 6: Centering prayer
Keating (1994); Video: Keating (1994)

Wk 7: Charismatic Prayer; Benett & Bennett (1973)
Healing Prayer; McNutt (1974) & Dossey (1993)

Wk 8: Prayer books; Van De Weyer (1993)
Divine Office; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1976)
Rosary; Harty (1997), & Novenas; Lovasik (1986)

Select History of Prayer

Wk 9: Old Testament Scriptures
Abraham, Moses, and David; Ester, Ruth, Deborah
Bible; Flinders (1993)

Wk 10: New Testament Scriptures
Jesus, Paul; Mary, Martha; Bible

Wk 11: Saints through the ages; Chervin (1992)
Desert Fathers and Mothers; Christian Classics Etheral /Library website
Sts. Frances and Clare of Assisi (Talbot, 1985)
Sts. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila (Dubay, 1989)

Wk 12: St. Theresa of Liseuix (1972)
St. Frances de Sales (1994)
St. Ignatius of Loyola (Flemming, 1978)

Contemporary advice on the prayer journey

Wk 13: How I pray now (Manney, 1997):
Scanlan, Talbot, Groschel, Bartocci
For the love of God (Carlson & Shield, 1997):
Mother Teresa, Fox, De Angeles, Gawin, McNamara

Dialogue with other Religious Traditions

Wk 14: Hinudu Mantrams (Easwaren, 1998)
Islam; Islam and the call to prayers website
Judaism; Judaism and the Shabbot website
Zen Mediation; Austin (1998), Aiken (1992),
/&Walker (1987)

Wk 15: Presentation of Papers

Wk 16: Comprehensive Final Exam

Lecture/Discussion/Activities

Each week will include readings from a course packet and/or web site(s) in addition to audio/video materials which will be the basis of lecture topics and class discussion for the week. Each week will also include at least one in-class and one out-of class prayer activity. The prayer activities are designed to provide students with a range of prayer experiences in order to discover the types of prayers that are best suited to their personality and expression of faith/spirituality.

Prayer Journal

Along with the prayer activities, students will keep a journal to record their prayer experiences, both in and outside of class. A minimum of two entries per week are required, one based on a in-class prayer activity and one based on an out-of-class prayer activity (For example, see Progoff, 1975, & Link, 1976). Each typed journal entry should follow the format of: date, title of prayer activity, description of prayer experience, and reflection on prayer experience.

Paper and Presentation

Each student will investigate some aspect of prayer to be negotiated with the instructor, and write a 5-7 page research paper on their findings. The methodology for the paper may be one or more of the following: library/internet literature review, interviews, surveys, experiments, and observational/field study. Choice of prayer topics for the paper are due the 4th week of class, outlines for papers are due the 8th week of class, final papers are due the 12th week of class, and presentations begin the 16th week of class (a summary of what you learned from writing the paper be presented and discussed for the class in a colloquium type format).

Examinations

There will be about 4 short answer announced quizzes during the course of the term to encourage incremental learning of course material. The lowest quiz will be dropped from the student's grade. In addition, there will be a comprehensive multiple choice based final examination. We will devote one class period to reviewing for the final exam.

List of Sources for Packet of Readings

Books:

Aitken, Robert (1992). The dragon who never sleeps. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Austin, James, H. (1998). Zen and the brain: toward an understanding of meditation and consciousness. Cambridge, MS: MIT Press.

Bennett, Denis, & Bennett, Rita (1973). The Holy Spirit and you. Plainsfield, NJ: Logos.

Carlson, Richard, & Shield, Benjamin (Eds.) (1997). For the love of God. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Chervin, Ronda (1992). Quotable saints. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant.

De Mello, Anthony (1978). Sadhana: A way to God. St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources.

Dossey, Larry (1993). Healing words: The power of prayer and the practice of medicine. NY: Harper Collins.

Douglas, Julie (1998). Handbook for spiritual directors. NY: Paulist Press.

Dubay, Thomas (1989). Fire within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel—on prayer. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.

Dubay, Thomas (1993). Seeking spiritual direction: How to grow the divine life within. Ann Arbor: MI: Servant Publications.

Easwaran, Eknath (1998). The mantram handbook. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.

Fleming, David (1978)(trans). The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius: A literal translation and a contemporary reading. St. Louis, MO: Institue of Jesuit Sources.

Flinders, Carol (1993). Enduring grace: Living portraits of seven women mystics. San Francisco: Harper.

Groeschel, Benedict (1984). Listening at prayer. NY: Paulist Press.

Harty, Gabriel (1997). The riches of the rosary. Dublin: Veritas.

Johnston, William (1973). The cloud of unknowing. NY: Doubleday.

Keating, Thomas (1994). Intimacy with God. NY: Crossroad Publishing.

Kreeft, Peter (1991). Prayer: The great conversation. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

Link, Mark (1976). You: Prayer for beginners and those who have forgotten how. Allen, TX: Tabor.

Lovasik, Lawrence (1986). Treasury of novenas. NY: Catholic Publishing Company.

Manney, Jim (Ed.) (1997). How I pray now. Hunington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor.
McNutt, Francis (1974). Healing. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press.
Menninger, William (1994). The loving search for God: Contemplative prayer and the cloud of unknowing. NY: continuum.
Merton, Thomas (1971). Contemplative prayer. NY: Image Books.
Okumura, Augustine Ichira (1994). Awakening to prayer. Washington, D. C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies.
Poloma, Margaret, & Gallop, George, Jr. (1991). Varieties of prayer: A survey report. Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press.
Progoff, Ira (1975). At a journal workshop. NY: Dialogues House Libray.
St. Frances de Sales (1994). An introduction to the devout life. Rockford, IL: Tan Books.
St. Therese of Liseux (1972). The story of a soul (John Clarke, Trans.). Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Stuides.
Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1976). Christian prayer: The liturgy of the hours. NY: Catholic Book Publishing Company.
Talbot, J. M. (1985). The lover and the beloved: A way of Franciscan prayer. NY: Crossroad Publishing.
Walker, Susan (1987). Speaking of silence: Christians and Buddhists on the contemplative way. NY: Paulist Press.
Van De Weyer, Robert (Ed.) (1993). The Harper Collins book of prayers. NJ: Castle Books.

Videos

Dubay, Thomas (1995). Contemplation: Union with God (Vol's. 1 & 2). Harrison, NY: Ignatius Press.
Easwaran, Eknath (1993). Meditation. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.
Groschel, Benedict (1991). Prayer: A way of life. Boston, MA: Veritas Video Production.
Keating, Thomas (1994). The Christian contemplative tradition: Method of centering prayer (parts 1 &2). Butler, NJ: Contemplative Outreach.
Menninger, William (1994). The cloud of unknowing (parts 1-6). Butler, NJ: Contemplative Outreach.

Journal Articles

Baesler, E. James (1997). Interpersonal Christian prayer and communication. The Journal of Communication and Religion, 20, 5-14.

Baesler, E. James (1999). A model of interpersonal Christian prayer. The Journal of Communication and Religion, 22, 40-64.

Finney, J. & Malongy, H., Jr. (1985). Empirical studies of Christian prayer: A rreview of the literature. Journal of Psychology and Theology, 4, 104-115.

Francis, L. & Evans, T. (1995). The psychology of Christian prayer: A review of empirical research. Religion, 25, 371-388.

Poloma, M. & Pendleton, B. (1991). The effects of prayer and prayer experiences on measures of general well-being. Journal of Psychology and Theology, 19, 71-83.

Stark, R. (1965). A taxonomy of religious experience. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 5, 97-116.

Web Sites

Christian Classics Etheral Library
http://www.ccel.org

Eastern Religion Links (Buddhism, Taoism, and others)
http://www.gtu.edu/library/LibEasternRel.html

Hinduism and Worship
http://www.geocities.com/~omkara/realizin.htm

Inter-Religious Faith Project:
http://www.felician.edu/irfp/faith.htm

Islam and the Call to Prayers
http://crusher.bev.net/community/sedki/pray

Judaism and the Shabbat
http://www.shabbatshalom.com

Online prayer
http://www.onlineprayer.org

Society for the scientific study of religion
http://fhss.byu.edu/soc/ssr/index.html

Spiritual Direction
http:// www.spiritualdirection.com/index.htm

Theology Library
http://www.megill.pvt.kiz.al.us/jerryd/cathmob.htm

Virtual Santuary
http://www.gamut.com/divine.htm

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the most striking findings of the present pilot study on teaching personal prayer in the academic context is the small percentage (10%) of Catholic institutions of higher education in the continental U.S. that offer courses on personal prayer. I had originally expected that a majority of such institutions would offer courses on personal prayer. One possible explanation for the small percentage of Catholic courses on personal prayer is the Catholic focus on liturgical prayer (most of the Catholic institutions offered one or more courses on liturgical prayer). Perhaps other Christian institutions of higher education, such as those associated with the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Assemblies of God denominations, would have a greater emphasis on personal prayer and less of an emphasis on liturgical prayer. A internet survey using the Yahoo search engine for other Christian colleges (Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Nazarene, Pentecostal, and Presbyterian) yielded 221 institutions of higher education that might offer courses on personal prayer. Exploring these internet sites for future research is needed to expand the boundary conditions of the present Catholic sample and allow for inter-denominational comparisons. Eventually, the boundary conditions could be further expanded to include institutions of higher education that are affiliated with other spiritual traditions (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) for the purpose of inter-religious comparisons of teaching prayer in the academic context.

The academy is not the only context one could investigate the process of teaching/learning about personal prayer. Future research could examine other avenues in which an individual could learn/teach prayer. For example, in the Christian tradition one would expect to find one or more lessons in "Sunday school" or "Catechism class" dealing with the topic of prayer targeted toward youth. As for adults, there may be comparable classes, workshops, seminars, and retreats related to prayer offered by the local spiritual community. Finally, the internet provides a wealth of sites that have information related to prayer that could be utilized to teach and/or learn about prayer.

In general, the content analysis of course syllabi on personal prayer that instructors provided revealed some areas of consensus, but also distinct differences. Areas of consensus across the course syllabi included instructor profile, academic department, level of course, and content domains while areas of difference included particular course activities, course resources, and means of assessment. It is noteworthy that all five of the respondents that sent the author course syllabi were women with a Ph.D. or equivalent, and that only four of the original sample of 12 prayer courses in personal prayer had male instructors (two were retired priests). The influence of women religious in institutions of Catholic higher education for the relatively new academic area of personal prayer would not be considered unusual

since women religious are actively involved in many areas of the church such as young adult ministry, charismatic renewal, and spiritual direction. The fact that the majority of the courses were housed in academic departments with the title (or partial title) of religious studies is complimentary with the profile of women religious instructors that offer the prayer courses. However, prayer as a kind of spiritual communication is academically much broader than "religious studies" and could conceptually include other disciplines such as communication, psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

As for specific content areas of the curriculum, there were many similarities in comparing the courses on personal prayer. Since the majority of courses were offered at the undergraduate level one would expect some consensus in the type and level of content covered. For example, all courses covered a basic understanding of prayer from a practical and theoretical standpoint. In contrast, other pragmatic dimensions of the courses were quite diverse such as the in- and out-of-class prayer activities. Methods of assessment, while having common themes such as journals and papers, varied considerably in their specific requirements. One might capitalize on such diversity in future research by, for example, evaluating the various papers assigned to determine which papers were the most beneficial for students' theoretical understanding and practice of prayer. It is possible that the prayer research paper would be beneficial for understanding prayer on a theoretical level while keeping a personal prayer journal would be more beneficial for exploring the practice of prayer, and the spiritual autobiography paper might be a middle ground that would inform both the theory and practice of prayer.

The greatest diversity among the personal prayer courses was in the area of prayer resources. While there were three books used in at least two of the fives courses (Awakening to Prayer, Bible, and Sadhana), all of the other books, journal articles, videos, and web sites were unique to a particular course on personal prayer. It may be that these unique resources are peculiar to the instructor's personal prayer life or academic training in prayer. Individuals trained in Ignatian spirituality might gravitate toward a book such as Sadhana (De Mello, 1978) which emphasizes the role of the bodily senses, imagination and memory in connecting with scripture, while an individual trained in Carmelite spirituality might be more apt to use a book that emphasizes the Apophatic dimension of prayer such as the Cloud of Unknowing (Johnston, 1973). As instructors of religious communication, we all are concerned with the praxis and theory of teaching and learning about prayer, in our own personal lives and in the lives of our students. Anyone interested in teaching personal prayer can benefit from the "ideal" course syllabi presented in this study since it reflects the contribution of various spiritualities on prayer such as Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, and Ignatian-a truly Catholic perspective.

Table 1 Percentage Breakdown of Assessment/Grading

Percentage of Courses Requiring	Method of Assessment	Percentage of Student's Grade
100 %	Journal/Portfolio	10 - 30 %
75 %	Paper(s)	13 - 30 %
75 %	Discussion/Participation	10 - 25 %
50 %	Examinations	30 - 60 %
50 %	Individual Presentations	10 - 40 %

Notes

[1] Sample headlines from last years New York Times (1999) included: Alternative religions as a growth industry, From witches to angels: Alternative spirituality, Some faiths are offering spiritual alternatives to millennial partying, Squeezing in soul time: New Yorker's take five from the workday to feed the soul. Amazon.com's website on the top 37 books (1/2000) included titles such as: The Testament, The Poisonwood bible, The legend of Luke, Kiss of God, and Joseph had a little overcoat. The Film industry has also produced a number of recent (1999-2000) religious films such as: Prince of Egypt, Stigmata, From Jesus to Christ, and CNN Millennium.